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C.I.A. Inept on Pope Plot, D'Amato Says

By PHILIP TAUBMAN

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ROME, Feb. 7 — Senator Alfonse D'Amato said today that the Central Intelligence Agency had failed to pursue an investigation into the shooting of Pope John Paul II.

The New York Republican also said the agency had tried to discourage investigation into possible Bulgarian and Soviet involvement in the shooting.

Mr. D'Amato, calling the C.I.A.'s efforts "shockingly inept," said he had been told by a senior agency official at the United States Embassy here that "not one person has been assigned to follow developments in the case."

Top C.I.A. officials in Washington have said privately that the papal shooting is not a subject of intense scrutiny and that no special effort has been made to follow developments in the Italian investigation. "It is an Italian matter," a senior C.I.A. official in Washington said last month, "and it would be inappropriate for us to intrude."

Mr. D'Amato, who arrived here Friday for a five-day visit to talk with Italian and American authorities, added that the intelligence official had said other matters, including Libyan support for terrorism and the transfer of sensitive technology from Western Europe and the United States to the Communist bloc, left little time for the C.I.A. staff in Italy to track the investigation into the shooting of the Pope in May 1981.

Senior agency officials in Washington say they are highly skeptical about any Bulgarian and Soviet links to Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk convicted of shooting the Pope in St. Peter's Square.

After his conviction, Mr. Agca reportedly told Italian authorities that three Bulgarians working in Rome in 1981 helped him plan the assassination attempt.

Last November, Italian authorities arrested one of the Bulgarians, Sergei I. Antonov, head of the Bulgarian airline office in Rome, and they are still holding him on suspicion of complicity in the attack. The two other Bulgarians, both employees at the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome, returned to Bulgaria and are now there. They, like Mr. Antonov, have denied any involvement in the case.

'Not Chasing Illusory Theories'

Mr. D'Amato, after a meeting today with Ilario Martella, the Italian magistrate investigating the shooting, said it was his impression that "the Italian investigators are not chasing illusory theories."

"The Bulgarian connection is well-grounded in fact," Mr. D'Amato said, "and they have information in their possession which establishes it." He said, however, that Mr. Martella had declined to discuss any of the evidence.

Mr. D'Amato said Mr. Martella had told him that investigators would like to conclude their work by summer but that additional evidence and witnesses could force a delay.

According to Mr. D'Amato, Mr. Martella said he was not wedded to any theory about the shooting and intended to determine whether or not the assertions made by Mr. Agca were supported by facts. Mr. D'Amato said he inferred from remarks made by Mr. Martella that Italian authorities had ruled out the possibility that Mr. Agca is mentally deranged and, therefore, completely unreliable.

Mr. D'Amato is in Rome in his capacity as a member of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, better known as the Helsinki Commission to Monitor Human Rights Violations. He has met with senior members of the Italian Government and top officials at the United States Embassy.

The issue of the C.I.A.'s response to the shooting was on his mind when he left Washington last Thursday. At the last moment, Mr. D'Amato said, a member of the staff of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence who had planned to accompany him to Rome was ordered to cancel his trip by another senator. When Mr. D'Amato

asked why and offered to pay the aide's trip, he said he was told that the C.I.A. was irritated with the aide's interest in the assassination attempt.

In Rome, Mr. D'Amato's concern about the agency was heightened by a meeting with a senior intelligence official on Saturday. "The only thing they could tell me about the case," he said, "tended to place doubt on information already made available about the shooting."